

WALTER PFAFF

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewers

Hicklen Knapp
(signature)

(signature)

(signature)

6/15/76
(date)

Interviewee

Walter Hoff
(signature)

131 Kansas
(address)

Frankfort Ill
(city & state)

6/15/76
(date)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Reisdence.	5
Earliest Memories of Frankfort	8
Father's Barber Shop	10
Frankfort Businesses	12
First Utilities.	14
Frankfort Police Department.	16
The Building of Route 30	18
Duties as City Clerk	22
Frankfort Today.	24
Index	26



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INTERVIEWEE: Walter Pfaff

INTERVIEWER: Kathleen Knippel

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Walter Pfaff for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project by Kathleen Knippel at Mr. Pfaff's home in Frankfort on June 15, 1976, at four o'clock.

KNIPPEL: Mr. Pfaff, when were you born?

PFAFF: I was born June 20, 1897.

KNIPPEL: And where were you born?

PFAFF: I was born in Chicago.

KNIPPEL: When did you move to Frankfort?

PFAFF: I was about nine years old when we moved here. That would be . . .

KNIPPEL: That would be around 1906. Where was your first home in Frankfort?

PFAFF: Our first home was where Santoro has his office now. I don't know what the number of the place is. Ma, give me that telephone book, would you? My dad first came here, the barber shop was just west of where Santoro's office is (112 West Kansas).

KNIPPEL: Your father was a barber?

PFAFF: Yes, that's where he first opened the barber shop. He bought out George Haass. Then later on he bought the building that belonged to Buch. And he bought the building and then he lived upstairs. When he first come here I think he stayed with my mother's sister. He stayed with her for a short while.

KNIPPEL: And she lived in Frankfort?

PFAFF: Yes.

KNIPPEL: Where were your parents originally from?

PFAFF: My mother was born in Green Garden Township and my dad was born in Green Garden Township and he opened a barber shop in Monee, Illinois. From Monee, Illinois he went to Chicago and bought a shop there at Madison, California and Colorado Avenue. Then he finally decided he wanted to get out of Chicago and come out to Frankfort. And we moved out to Frankfort. We moved--Dr. Hedges and Barney Zeklin . . . it was all within a year that they all come to Frankfort. Of course, I went to school here; then I went to Metropolitan College. Later on I helped him in the barber shop. I got my license and worked with him until he passed away. Then I took over and Burnett Scham worked for me until I retired out of there. I think I went out of there in 1960. During that time I had all the village stuff over in the barber shop for 1923 on. I was clerk, see. When I retired I think I had 51 or 52 years in as clerk and I retired from that.

Then, of course, they asked me to work part time over there and that would be the first week in each month and Saturdays. Since then I've been over there until the accident.

KNIPPEL: Are you planning on going back?

PFAFF: Well, I imagine I'll go back because I know the girls don't like to work on Saturdays. So as long as I can do it it will be something to do, you know, but at the present time until I get settled on this mess I'm in . . .

KNIPPEL: Where did you go to high school?

PFAFF: I didn't go to high school. I went to Metropolitan Business College. That was in Joliet.

KNIPPEL: Do you remember what location or what it would be near?

PFAFF: Oh, God, I can't remember that. I know the Orpheum Theater was running at that time and on Saturday nights we used to go there on the streetcar and they had eight acts of vaudeville. The movie picture cost us 25¢ to get in.

KNIPPEL: That was the Orpheum Theater?

PFAFF: The Orpheum Theater. They had stage shows there.

KNIPPEL: Where was that?

PFAFF: That's on Chicago Street. I don't know the streets in Joliet very well. I know Chicago and Cass Street and

that's about it. But the Orpheum Theater was . . . let's see, right across the street is that store that's been in business for a long, long time . . . I don't know. I haven't been in there for a long time, but I can tell you that from Cass Street it was one block north on the east side of the street. Not right on the corner, but one door south. I think now there was, I know, a place you could buy glasses at discount there. I don't know if they're there anymore or not. But that's where the theater was.

KNIPPEL: Could you describe your earliest memory of Frankfort?

PFAFF: I can remember a lot of things about Frankfort. I can remember that Levy Doty--that's where Dr. Otto lives--that was his place and he had a lot of horses and I understand and I know that he had a cemetery right across from Alsip's where he used to bury the horses there. He used to make sap; that is, he used to tap sap trees and make maple syrup out of it and he had a great big vat in his backyard. And he used to have cans on a little slung wagon and go out and take these cans off the trees and dump them in and then he had a great big vat. He had a fire underneath and he boiled that sap until it got thick and I can remember that he had two goats there that Herbert Gullickson and I used to drive around every night around town in a little farm wagon. He didn't like to see anybody cruel to animals. I know, one night he went in there to hitch up the goats and, of course, he turned his back to close the gate and one goat bucked him,

see, and he got so mad and he picked up a stick and just when he was hitting the goat in the head why old Levy Doty came in and, boy, he bawled us out. And Herb says, "Well, you go in there." And he was hard of hearing but he could read your lips. He had a red beard; I remember that because I trimmed it alot of times. And he went in and, of course, he turned his back and the goat bucked him. So he let a couple cuss words out which he never done before. He said, "Kill him, Herbert, Kill him!" Of course, he didn't mean it because he was real good to animals. Of course, the Folkers Bros. over here--I don't know whether Herb Folkers told you--they used to have a lot of ponies and they had a great big tent. They used to grind great big rock out here. I think it's around what they called Marley Road in through there. Anyhow, there was a pit out there somewhere between here and New Lenox and he used to have a lot of men working for him. They done their own cooking. They used to grind these stones and used them to put on the roads. Well, after they get done using this big tent, not the biggest tent, but one of the tents where they fed the men in--we used to put it up in Peter Folkers' yard over on the corner of Hickory and Nebraska Street and we used to have a circus there. We had these ponies. Then we would charge two cents for the kids to get in and we'd have a little parade. The kids would put in their cat or dog or whatever they had in a little wagon. We'd come up the street and then we'd go over there and have this little parade. Those are just some of the things that

you done years ago. I can remember when my salary then was \$13 a week.

KNIPPEL: When would that have been?

PFAFF: That would have been when I first started working in the barber shop. That would have been . . . let me figure that out. I think I was 15 years old when I got my barber's license. So that would have been about 1912, wouldn't it? 1912, 1914, something like that. I used to give my wife \$3 out of the \$13 and she would keep the house all week for the \$3 and the rest of it we'd put in the bank for taxes and stuff like that. Of course, later on we built this house, I lived right next door. We built this house and my dad gave us these lots and then we built the house. There wasn't much to do in the shop in the daytime, you know. So I got a job with Charlie Pfaff the mason and I worked for them on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, but I didn't collect any pay for it. I just let him put it on credit, you know . . . so I could pay him off because I couldn't get enough of a loan and he being a relation of mine, he helped me along. So I just left it ride and took it off the bill. I've got a little red book someplace. . . (PAUSE) . . . Now this is the little book that will give you an idea of what my dad took in at the barber shop. And he had a barber hired before I started to work. This starts out in 1910. This is 6½ days because we worked a half a day on Sunday from seven o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock. In fact, we worked six

days a week from seven o'clock in the morning until ten-thirty at night. And Saturday we never got out until twelve o'clock at night. So in 1910 for all the week was \$26.25. That was my dad and a barber. Johnny Fox worked for him. Well, it varies . . . \$26.36, \$42.26--that's for the month. January \$23--this is a week, see--\$23.50, \$22, \$21.50, \$21.30, \$27.60, \$26.70, \$24.80 and that's the way it goes on. And then it rose a little bit because I think they went up in price because when he came out a shave was 10¢ and a haircut was 15¢. In 1918 it was \$44.30. This is a week, see . . . \$34.90, \$35.55, \$33.15, \$34.20, \$35.80, \$44.30, \$48.75, \$51.15. Now that was 1919 when these prices went up from 1918 because I think they raised the price, you know, the haircuts and shaves.

KNIPPEL: What was the popular style in those days?

PFAFF: Just a regular haircut like they used to get years ago.

KNIPPEL: Did they have moustaches and beards?

PFAFF: Well, a lot of them had moustaches, yes, and beards but they got a regular haircut. So 1926 was . . . this is a bigger spurt for the month . . . \$83.20, \$73.55, \$85.00, \$85.50 and then I can't go any further than that because there's no more in here. Of course, I can tell you that the streetcar fare from here to Joliet and return was a dollar. You'd go to Joliet and come home. My dad used to give me a

dollar because when I was learning all I did was lather up the people and he came and shaved them, see. Well, out of that dollar the fare to Joliet and back was 45¢. The Orpheum Theater we used to go to was 25¢. That was 70¢. Oh yes, we used to go in and get a hot beef sandwich and mashed potatoes and gravy for 25¢. That was 95¢. Then we used to buy a bag of popcorn. That was a nickel and then we'd get on the streetcar and come home.

KNIPPEL: What was the occupation of most of the people in Frankfort?

PFAFF: Well, we had a lot of farmers then, but Balchowsky's store down there was the biggest store. I think they had about 13 clerks in that store. The whole upstairs was full of stoves--all kinds of stoves and mostly stuff to cook with and all of that. Then the downstairs on the north side was all men's suits. You could go in there and buy a suit just like you could down in Joliet. On the south side was the grocery department and if you wanted anything and they didn't have it in the store, they used to make one trip to Chicago a week and pick it up for you. They had a great big salt shed for the farmers that would come in and buy rock salt for their cattle. And, of course, Baumann's was on the corner. That was the old tavern.

KNIPPEL: Do you remember any other businesses?

PFAFF: Oh yes. I remember Briggeman's Tavern, Eichmeyer's

Tavern, Sippel's Tavern. I remember right over on the corner here Priami's. That was bought by Tom Collier from Chicago. That used to have a bar up there. When you'd go in they'd play tricks on you, you know. You'd take somebody in; you knew it was there, but they didn't. And they served beer in a tin cup and they had a little button on the counter where they set this tin cup on and when you'd pick it up you'd get a shock. And then he had an upstairs. He had the upstairs; you'd go up there and he had a lot of coffins up there with dummies laying in them, you know. Then when you wanted to come down the stairs would fold up and you'd slide down. And that gentleman moved out to Mokena and then finally he came over here and bought this place over here. He put a bar in there. A little guy by the name of Billy Williams came out from Chicago with him and he was kind of a handyman, janitor and he had the hotel over there. Finally, he sold it to Priami's. Well, it was a restaurant and ice cream parlor and Priami from Blue Island had bought it and then after while Joe Cavallini bought it himself, see, and then they put in an ice cream parlor instead of the bar. I can remember Folkers Bros. livery barn and can remember the fire that was there. I forget how many horses burnt there. I think it was 10 or 13 horses that burned up. They saved the houses across this way on Kansas Street. That house there. This house wasn't there. (131 Kansas Street) That house there (the house east of 131 Kansas Street at the present date). They threw all kinds of carpets and blankets and then they

wet it with a hose so it didn't catch fire. But I can remember the shingles flying as far as three quarters of a mile east of town here where they found them in the field--burnt shingles, you know. Right off hand I can remember the street-car came December 18, 1908. The electric lights came April 12, 1913, and the gas was September 8, 1927. And, by the way, I kept time for the gas company and I still got the first gas stove down in the basement. It's still connected down there. I was the first one to receive gas in the village of Frankfort because I worked for the gas company and they said, "You can say you were the first one to use the gas." And I still got the gas stove down in the basement since '27.

KNIPPEL: Do you remember anything about the earliest churches?

PFAFF: No, but I remember I was confirmed by Reverend Lambrecht and, of course, that was in the old church.

KNIPPEL: Where would that have been?

PFAFF: The same place the new one is. See, they moved it off and moved it back when they built the new one.

KNIPPEL: Are you talking about St. Peter's?

PFAFF: Yes, St. Peter's United Church of Christ and the residents were right in back of the church. So they moved the church to the side of the residents and then built the new church. I've got pictures of that, but I don't just remember what year that was unless I look at those pictures.

You know, it's probably on the pictures on the cornerstones that they laid.

KNIPPEL: Do you think you can describe the typical day of a person who lived in Frankfort?

PFAFF: Well, I can remember Albert Baumgartner that used to deliver milk in town. He had a little cart and he had regular milk cans full of milk. Then you'd give him your pail and he would put down this can of milk and scoop out and put it in your pail. When he'd get done delivering he always used to stop at Baumann's corner--just drive up there and leave the horse stand. A lot of times he wouldn't know when to go home. And the horse, you know, would get figgety and sometimes it would go home and leave him there. He had to cross the E. J. & E. railroad tracks, and at that time they used to come down on the "J" tracks in what they called a "double header." One engine in front of the other. And just on the other side of Elsner's Road the first train would unhook from the regular train, you know, and they'd go like the dickens to get up in rank and get to the switch to let this train go by. That horse would know that when he got to that railroad track; a couple of times he even stopped, you know, and let the train go by without getting hit. But that crossing was when you go down Locust Street right where the Bog Werner is; there was a crossing that went across the "J" there.

KNIPPEL: You mentioned the Folkers' fire. Was there any

other big disasters in Frankfort that you can remember?

PFAFF: Well, I can remember when your grandfather died. We didn't have any policemen on duty for regular duty so I always used to take the fire calls up until 1960 when I told them I wasn't going to do it anymore and then they got this other system. But I used to take the police calls and I used to take the fire calls. I was the only one that had a telephone. So when they didn't have anybody on duty I used to go out . . . take the calls and then go out myself. I never got anything for it but I done it on my own hook. Then they had a man from New Lenox who used to come in at six o'clock in the evening and stay in until twelve o'clock at night. Well, he finally quit and they hired another guy from Matteson to come in at the same time. And then some guy drifted in here and applied for the police job and they gave it to him and he was supposed to be on duty like all the time, but he turned out to be a farce. So they canned him. The guys that were on duty after twelve o'clock were Fred Breymeyer, Fred Weiscleberger and, I think, Frank Eisenbrandt. I used to have at least . . . there wasn't a night that would go by that you wouldn't have somebody knock at the door at twelve, one, two, three, four o'clock in the morning and want shelter. So you'd get up and take them over to the village hall and put them in the hall and leave them out the next morning. You couldn't lock them up in the cells because there was nobody on duty. So we used to keep the front door locked and we could get out the front windows and stuff like

that if there was a fire, but you couldn't put them in the cell. I can remember when one night a man and a woman come and wanted to get in the hall for shelter and I told them OK and I walked over with them. That was about two-thirty in the morning. I can remember that because the next morning they put a lot of newspapers on the floor and the next morning I went over there and opened the door and they started to walk out and I said, "Pick up the newspapers and put them in the furnace." And the woman got snotty and said, "We're not going to pick up your newspapers for you. Pick them up yourself." So she went out the door and I put my foot across the door then I said, "You ain't going to get out until you pick up those newspapers." Well, she cussed me and she called me all the cuss words you could think of, but he picked the papers up and while this was all going on Robert Stevens cut across and went into the post office which was next door and he said, "What's going on, Walt?" And I said, "It's OK. Everything is straightened out." So they went out and I used to get all the literature on the convicts and bad guys that they had a reward on. So I got the mail and I looked at it and I said, "Oh-oh." There was a picture of that couple. And there was, I think, a \$1500 reward for their capture of both of them. I walked over there to Robert Stevens and I said, "Bob, you recognize them?" He said, "By golly, ain't that the couple you had in the lock-up?" And I said, "Yes. They can't be very far away." They didn't have no car or anything. So I called up two or three of them

that wanted to go along with me to pick them up, but nobody would go. Oh, and we had Ernest Miller was policeman, too, from six o'clock until twelve o'clock at night. And he got shot on Sauk Trail. He was after a couple in a car and he was on the running board. In those days, they had running boards on the cars. He was going to stop them and the guy reached out and killed him deader than a doornail.

KNIPPEL: Do you remember what the couple was wanted for?

PFAFF: They were wanted for murder.

KNIPPEL: And here you were arguing with them.

PFAFF: They had killed a policeman, too. That's what they wanted them for.

KNIPPEL: Do you remember anything about the building of Route 30 through Frankfort?

PFAFF: The gentleman that built Route 30--the boss and his son--stayed with me here. The engineers when they layed it out, the surveyors--there was four of them. They all boarded here. I had two of them that stayed in the back bedroom and the other two slept down at my mother's and they finally came up one day and said, "Well, we're going to stay up here." I said, "How can you stay up here? That's only a small bedroom," I said. "There's room for two beds in it but you're going to be crowded." "Well, we don't care." We had a davenport that used to fold out and make a bed out of

it. One guy said, "Well, we'll fix that." So he got a hold of a cot and the other guy got a hold of the davenport. They took it a part. I never will forget that. And they got it in the bedroom and they couldn't get it together. It took us about a good hour to figure how to get it together. So we got it together and they stayed here. My wife used to get a present from them for five years after on Christmas. They always used to send her a check for \$25.

KNIPPEL: That was really nice.

PFAFF: Yes. And this Eichmann, I think that was his name, the boss, when they used this first stuff to build the highway it was just like water when they put it on, see, but after you put it on it turned real hard. I know the barber shop over there . . . I had a barrel of it and I painted the whole roof and I don't know how many years ago that is and it's still on there. When they built the concrete road they had a bunch of fellows from Peoria that were truck drivers and they had the plant set up right over here where the parking lot is now. They mixed the concrete there and hauled it out.

KNIPPEL: Did many people have cars in Frankfort?

PFAFF: Well, there was quite a few cars. On Saturday night, why they used to give free movies down here on the vacant lot--a parking lot now--and the town was really loaded. You couldn't hardly get around. They'd get their free movie to

bring people to town and then they'd wait until next Saturday night and come to the free movie again. What else is there that I can remember?

KNIPPEL: You had mentioned that electricity came to Frankfort in 1913. Did most people have it?

PFAFF: As it run along, you know, each one connected as quick as they could because they wanted it. See, in the barber shop we had to work under four kerosene lights with the wicks. You'd fill those. They were great big ones. I had them in the garage, but somebody stold them on me. They had a bowl about that big and about that deep. They had a wick about that big. Of course, everything was hand clippered. It really used to get hot working under those things. We used to be really all tuckered out by the time that you got done on Saturday night, you know. A lot of the people only got shaved once a week.

KNIPPEL: How did the telephone come to affect the people of Frankfort?

PFAFF: I haven't got anything on the telephone but I can remember the operators. The operator was the Bruggeman girl, Anna Welsch and Mabel Folkers and a girl that just died-- Geneva was her name when she got married. What was her name before that? I can't think right now. . . Klepper, Geneva Klepper.

KNIPPEL: How important was the railroad to Frankfort?

PFAFF: Well, they used to have what they called the "dinky." It used to come here and go east at seven o'clock in the morning and used to go west at eleven o'clock and used to go east again at three o'clock in the afternoon and go west again until six o'clock. That had a baggage car and a passenger car. They hauled the mail and, of course, all the freight on there. When the streetcar came and took it away from them and give it to the streetcar and the streetcar had a freight car in in back of the freight car they pulled just nothing but a flat car. They had all this freight on the flat car, non-perishable stuff, you know. They had the perishable stuff in the freight car. And they used to just go up the street and anybody that had any freight on there and they lived on the front street, they just used to set it in front of your door.

KNIPPEL: Did World War I have any effect on Frankfort?

PFAFF: I wasn't here during World War I. Well, it had some effect. A lot of younger fellows were gone. I was gone for better than a year.

KNIPPEL: With all the taverns in Frankfort did Prohibition have any effect on it?

PFAFF: A lot of bootlegging. They had near beer and moon shine. It wasn't whisky, but it was bootleg whiskey. I think they called it bootleg whiskey. And, of course, they had other whiskey, you know, but if they didn't know you, you

couldn't get a hold of any, but if they knew you, they'd give you the real stuff.

KNIPPEL: Could you describe what your duties were as village clerk?

PFAFF: I went over to the hall . . . I was in the hall. The hall was closed on a Wednesday and a Saturday. The rest of the days, of course, the hall was open from nine o'clock to four o'clock and I took care of all the business of the village. Also after four o'clock I took care of the water works and when the sewer came in I was the second man on the sewer plant. I read the meters. I repaired the water meters and I was janitor--kept the hall clean, kept the grass cut. That generally was on a Wednesday and a Saturday that I wasn't in the hall. Well, like Sunday I had to check the Wells sewer plant. There was a regular man on there but I was second man in case he got sick. I never could go away on Sundays because there was nobody to answer the phone for the fire department or the police department. So I generally had to stick around. Fred Breymeyer did have a telephone in his home to help me out but very seldom, you know, I said, "Well, I ain't going to be home. I'm going to be here or there." So it was up to me to either take a chance that they'd call somebody else in case they had a fire. But as far as your fire fighters were concerned we never could get a quorum for the fire department to get our two percent insurance, you know. So what I said to them, "I'll tell you

what let's do. How about all you fellows joining the fire department that's on the village board. After we have our village meeting we'll adjourn the meeting and then call a fire department meeting. Then we'll have a quorum," which we did. We got our two percent. Then, of course, we had the hand cart which we'd go to a fire and have to run with the hand cart to put the fire out. I'll never forget down at Baumgartners--that's down on Pacific Street. You know where they live, don't you? Pacific right off of Hickory--west of Hickory on Pacific Street. They had their shed on fire there and I can't remember who was on the cart, but we pulled it and there was an awful bad bump at Nebraska Street there. They've finally concreted that. But we hit that and we didn't know it because we was on the front end pulling, you know. Nobody to the back of us. We got down there and the box with the wrenches in it was supposed to be snapped shut and they didn't put the snap on it and we got down there and we didn't have any wrenches. So we had to run all the way back to get a wrench to put out the fire.

KNIPPLE: Do you remember anything special about what went on in Frankfort politics?

PFUFF: Yes, I can remember. . . well, like I said, I had opposition running against me as clerk and I can remember Robert Stevens ran against me and he spent most of his time lecturing and having suckers in his pocket and giving the kids suckers and everything else. One thing I never did do.

I never did ask anybody to vote for me; never did because I felt I was in there. They know what I'm doing. If they are satisfied, they will vote for me. If they ain't, it doesn't do any good to talk to them because people, they'll do as they please anyhow. They'll say yes, but they'll vote the other way. Of course, I beat him. Then the next competition I had was William Wischover ran against me, and he had an awful lot of relations in town and I was a little leery. I thought, "Well, if he gets it, it's OK with me. I'm not going out and fight about it. Let him have it," because the salary as clerk was only \$40 a year. That's all it was. So they had the election and I know that day before election he was hauling chairs and everything down to his house for a celebration. So I think I beat him two to one. Then after that I had a few of them that had a petition signed but didn't amount to much.

KNIPPEL: Did World War II have any big effect on Frankfort?

PFAFF: Now wait. You were talking about World War I. World War II . . . I don't think there were so many. I don't remember it have an effect on Frankfort.

KNIPPEL: I have one final question. What do you think of Frankfort today?

PFAFF: Well, I've driven through a lot of towns. Not here lately but up until five years ago I drove through a lot of towns and not because I live here, but you know yourself,

you drive through a lot of towns--neighboring towns around. You got a pretty nice town here as far as roads are concerned and their homes are concerned and people are concerned. Sure, you got some radicals and you got what you call some "bad boys" but you got them in every community and I don't blame the boys for that. I think it's mostly the parents' fault because you catch a boy doing something then you tell the parents, "Oh, no. My boy wouldn't do that, absolutely wouldn't do that." And they stick up for them. So what are you going to do? You can't do anything. But as a whole, I don't know. I think Frankfort is a pretty nice town.

KNIPPEL: I do, too.

PFAFF: I do, too, because they've got good roads. They've got good waterworks. They've got a bunch of good men on the police department and fire department. They got a bunch of good men on the village board and the plan commission. Sure, you may have one or two here or there that don't agree with you. Sometimes I don't agree with them, but as a whole I think they used their heads pretty good because you can't always do as you think it should be done because the rest of them won't agree with you, you know. Of course, you have complaints coming in that a lot of them are sill, absolutely silly.

INDEX

- Balchowsky's Store, 12
 barber shop, 5-6, 10-11, 20
 Baumann's Tavern, 12, 15
 Baumgartner, 15
 Breymeyer, 16
 Briggeman's Tavern, 12

 Cavallini, Joe, 13
 Collier, Tom, 13

 Doty, Levy, 8-9

 Eichmeyer's Tavern, 12
 Eisenbrandt, Frank, 16
 electricity, 14, 20
 Elsner Road, 15

 fire department, 22-23
 Folkers Bros., 9, 13
 Folkers, Mabel, 20
 Folkers, Peter, 9
 Fox, Johnny, 11

 Gullickson, Herbert, 8-9

 Haass, George, 6
 Hedges, Dr., 6
 Hickory St., 9, 23

 Joliet, 7-8, 11-12

 Kansas St., 13
 kerosene lights, 20

 Lambrecht, Rev., 14

 Metropolitan Business
 College, 6-7
 Miller, Ernest, 18

 Nebraska St., 9, 23

 Orpheum Theater, 7, 12

 Pacific Street, 23
 Pfaff, Charlie, 10
 police department, 16
 politics, 23-24
 Priami's, 13
 prohibition, 21

 railroad, 20-21
 Route 30, 18

 St. Peter's United Church
 of Christ, 14
 Scham, Burnett, 6-7
 Sippel's Tavern, 13
 Stevens, Robert, 17, 23
 streetcar, 7, 11

 telephone, 20

 Weiscleberger, Fred, 16
 Welsch, Anna, 20
 Williams, Billy, 13
 Wischover, William, 24

 Zeklin, Barney, 6

